

## How Do You Get Paid?

As a commercial fisherman you'll not be on a payroll. You'll get no salary, no wages; your only income will be your share of the catch. There are, at this time, several methods of figuring shares. We shall have a look at three of them, but there are almost as many others as there are fisheries.

1. In the longline fisheries, the vessel takes a certain percentage of the total earnings (called gross stock) as its share. What is left is called net stock. From net stock one pays the bills for groceries, fuel, ice, bait, and worn-out (condemned) fishing gear. What now is left is divided equally among the entire crew, the skipper sharing equally with the rest of the men.

2. In some fisheries, such as the purse seine and the otter trawl fisheries, the vessel collects a certain percentage of the stock after specific gear expenses are paid, so that the crew does not pay into the maintenance of the trawl or the seine used. When the vessel's share has been deducted, the other bills (groceries, ice, fuel) are paid, and the remainder is divided equally among the crew, the skipper being a crew member for this purpose, although most non-owner skippers also collect a percentage of the boat's share as a commission.

3. A few vessel owners, mostly in the pot fishing fleet, and some few in the two-man trolling boat fleet, prefer to give the crew a certain percentage of gross earnings and keep the rest as the vessel's share. The vessel, or its owner, then maintains all fishing gear and is responsible for all bills, includ-

ing bills for food consumed during the trip, or season. Whatever virtues or drawbacks this method of sharing may have, it certainly does eliminate arguments about which bills belong to crew expenses and which bills belong elsewhere in the settlement. There are inequities in many share systems, but tradition makes change difficult.

If you enter into a fishery where the fishermen are organized, join the union. Not only should you join the union, you should become an active, working member; that's how you can help keep your union strong, useful, and democratic. When the crew belongs to a fishermen's union, there will be a "delegate" on the vessel, elected by the crew to his job for the current fishing season.

The delegate is your official spokesman, your go-between. Representing the crew, the delegate checks all bills, then makes them available for the crew's scrutiny. The delegate also assists the skipper in the weighing of the catch, for the trip or for the season as the case may be, and sits in (with the skipper) when the vessel's accountant works out the settlement and divides the money into shares. Such settlement may be for each trip, as in the longline and trawl fisheries, or it may be on a seasonal basis, as in the salmon and king crab fisheries.

Since the share system means generally that both crew and vessel share some expenses or all, the settlement sheet should be understood by you. The settlement is yours also. Here are some tips.

1. Know just which expense items are boat, crew, or mutually shared.

2. Pay particular attention to your share. Note if all your bills are deducted correctly and that the settlement sheet agrees with the numbers on your check stub. And do it now. Once the share is apportioned and the money banked, it is very difficult to make changes. Generally, corrections must wait until the settlement on the following trip.

No one is going to tell you how to spend that hard-earned cash, but it is well to keep in mind that with long trips and short seasons, that share may give you a false sense of prosperity. In the armed services, there was an old saw that the pay was \$200 a day—once a month.

Does the delegate participate in the settling up because it is assumed that the skipper or owner will try to cheat the crew? Not at all. Rather, the delegate is there because two heads are better than one; he is there simply to help prevent mistakes. The writer has served as delegate on a number of vessels and participated in a good many settlements. Not once—repeat—not once during the several years of such service has he met up with an attempt from the skipper/owner's side to cheat the crew. He has, however, been a party to discovering a number of would-be mistakes, some of which went in favor of the crew, mind you!

The moral? Join your union, elect your delegate, and see to it that he keeps his nose pretty close to the grindstone. Know the share system on your boat.